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Two Interesting Pieces of Early Philadelphia Silversmithing

THE collection of American Silver at the Museum has been increased recently by the addition of two unusual examples of Philadelphia silversmithing, interesting less, perhaps, for their intrinsic beauty, than for their importance in relation to the history of the craft in this city.

The first is a pear-shaped cream pitcher made by Abraham Dubois, decorated with a mid-band of flowers repoussé, and its importance centers about the fact that it is the earliest known piece of Philadelphia-made silver decorated in relief. It was a companion piece, originally, to an English sugar basin, hallmarked 1760, and it was probably an attempt by Dubois to match the English piece, at the request of the owner. It is scarcely possible to date it with close accuracy: that it must have been made after 1760 is obvious; that it is an early pitcher, judged by its shape, is also true; but we must not assume that pieces chased in relief (repoussé) were the fashion among the silversmiths of that period. It does prove, however, that American smiths as early as Revolutionary times were able to execute this type of ornamentation.

The earliest evidence of Dubois in Philadelphia is from an advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* for 1777, when he was selling his wares and executing orders at his home in Second Street, four doors below Arch Street. His name appears in the city directories intermittently from 1785 until 1802. He was surely of French origin, though of his parentage or of his birth we have no record at all; he died in 1807. All his larger pieces of silver that are known, show him to have been a smith of considerable skill and refined taste. His work may be identified by one or other of his punches, AD in an oval, and A DUBOIS, roman, in a long rectangle.

The other piece is a patch-box by Francis Richardson, first native American smith working in Philadelphia, father of the well-known Joseph Richardson, and grandfather of Joseph and Nathaniel, all smiths of prominence in their times. The box is oval, of a design which, in England, would be referred to the Queen Anne period. It is chased on the lid with a simple Tudor rose encircled by a conventional border. Even in collections of English silver a Queen Anne patch-box is somewhat of a rarity. Francis Richardson was born in New York in 1681, and removed to Philadelphia at the age of nine. In 1701 he first wrote himself goldsmith, and we find him paid by William Penn for a pair of buckles for Letitia Penn. The only other known examples of his work are a pair of buckles made for Elizabeth Paschall for her wedding, May 11, 1721. These, as is the patch-box, are marked with the elder Richardson's characteristic mark—F. R. in a heart.

S. W. W.



SILVER CREAM PITCHER BY ABRAHAM DuBOIS AND PATCHBOX BY
FRANCIS RICHARDSON

The marks on these pieces are shown on the right